

duties. In December, 1835, he was elected Speaker of the House of Representatives, and again in September last, after an animated contest. The duties of this difficult situation it is now conceded, he has discharged with rare fidelity and firmness. In the beginning, unusual difficulties were thrown in his way by an animosity which was sometimes carried to an extent that called for general animadversion. During the first session in which he presided, more appeals were taken from his decisions than had occurred in the whole period since the origin of the government; but he was uniformly sustained by the House, and by many of his political adversaries. Strangers of all parties who visit Washington are struck with the dignity, promptitude, and impartiality with which he presides over the deliberations of the House. It was with great pleasure that we heard, but the other day, an eminent member of the opposition in that body bear the same testimony. Notwithstanding the violence with which he had been assailed, Congress passed, at the close of the session in 1835, a unanimous vote of thanks to his presiding officer, from whom it separates with the kindest feelings, and friendship in a higher degree. His calmness and good temper have allayed the violence of opposition, in a station for which his quickness, coolness and sagacity eminently qualify him.

Few public men have pursued a firmer or more consistent course than Mr. Polk. Upon several emergencies, when the current of popular opinion threatened to overwhelm him, he has sternly adhered to the convictions of duty, preferring to sink with his principles, rather than rise by their abandonment. This we have noticed, was the case after his bank report in 1833, and he incurred the same hazard when, in 1835, he avowed his unalterable purpose not to separate from the democratic party in the presidential election. On each of these occasions, the popular excitement in his district, would have appalled and driven back a timid and time-serving politician. Had he been governed by selfish motives; had he, in short, regarded success more than principle, he would have yielded his own convictions to the indications, not to be mistaken, of popular opinion. But he took counsel of nobler sentiments, and with a fearlessness characteristic of his whole public course, avowed and persisted in his well-tempered determinations. He succeeded in carrying truth home to an enlightened constituency, was sustained by increasing majorities, and is now so strong in the good will of his district, that at the last election no opposition was attempted. Nothing can be more false than the charge of subserviency which has been brought against him, in common with the prominent supporters of the late administration. It is true that despising the cant of *no party*, which has ever been the pretext of selfish and treacherous politicians, and convinced that in a popular government nothing can be accomplished by isolated action, he has always acted with his party, as far as principle would justify. Upon most of the prominent measures of the late administration, however, his opinions were not only generally known, but he had actually spoken or voted, before the accession of General Jackson to power.

Mr. Polk is a ready debater, with a style and manner forcible and impressive. In discussion, he has been always distinguished by great courtesy, never having been known to indulge in offensive personality, which, considering the prominence of his course, and the ardor of his convictions, is no small merit. As a proof of his exemplary assiduity, he is said never to have missed a division, while occupying a seat on the floor of the House, his name being found upon every list of the yeas and nays. His ambition was to be a useful member as well as a prominent actor, and accordingly he always performed more than a full share of the active business of legislation. In person he is of middle stature, with a full, angular brow, and a quick and penetrating eye. The expression of his countenance is grave, but its serious cast is often relieved by a peculiarly pleasant smile, indicative of the amenity of his disposition. The amiable character of his private life, which has ever been upright and pure, secures to him the esteem and friendship of all who have the advantage of his acquaintance.

From the Democratic Review, Feb., 1844.

George M. Dallas.

Mr. Dallas was born in the city of Philadelphia on the 10th day of July, 1792. He is the elder son of Alexander J. Dallas, one of the most accomplished advocates & distinguished statesmen that have adorned the legal profession of the United States, or sustained, in important posts of public trust, the principles and policy of the republican party. He received the rudiments of his education at a school in Germantown, and afterwards at the Friends' Academy in Philadelphia. At the age of 14, he was entered in Princeton College, and continued there until 1810, when he was graduated with the highest honors of his class. He delivered their valedictory address, which is still remembered and adverted to in the college history as a striking example of feeling, eloquence, and taste. Indeed as a public speaker, he gave early promise of that excellence which has since been displayed in many of the prominent situations, to which his talents have elevated him; and a published oration, delivered when he was but seventeen years of age, and preserved in the Port Folio, strikingly attests the maturity of his powers.

On leaving college, Mr. Dallas commenced the study of the law, in the office of his father, at Philadelphia; and although, in the intervals of that severe study, the more attractive forms of literature and poetry were not infrequently cultivated, he yet persevered with unceasing application in making himself a thorough master of the great principles of the profession of which he has since been so distinguished a member. He was admitted to the bar in 1813. Soon after the declaration of war with England, he had enrolled himself in a volunteer corps; and when, in the year 1813, Mr. Gallatin was appointed by President Madison, a member of the commission that repaired to St. Petersburg, for the purpose of negotiating a peace under the mediation of the emperor Alexander, he accompanied that minister as his private and confidential secretary. During a residence of more than a year in Europe, Mr. Dallas had an opportunity of visiting Russia, France, England, Holland and the Netherlands. While in England, a family connected with Lord Byron brought him into frequent association with that great poet, who then, at twenty-five years of age, was received in London the general and enthusiastic admiration which the appearance of his two beautiful poems, the Giaour and the Bride of Abydos, could not fail to call forth. It was in consequence of a remark of a Mr. Dallas, upon the popularity in America of Childe Harold, and some of his previous poems, that he declared in his journal that these were the first thing that ever sounded to his ears like fame; and that popularity in a far and rising country, caused tidings very different from the ephemeral praises of the crowd of fashion then buzzing around him. Through another relative, the humane and eloquent jurist who was then the chief justice of the court of common pleas, it was Mr. Dallas's good fortune to be thrown, not infrequently, into the society of some of those eminent lawyers who have, by the brilliancy of their

genius, and devotion to philanthropy, made their profession yet more distinguished than it was in previous days. Romilly, whose beneficence flowed in a current so transparent, copious, and strong; Brougham, with his far-reaching, inquisitive, and undaunted utilitarianism; Mackintosh, who could wisely and kindly apply to the heated passions, and in the busy forums of men, the rules of conduct which he has deduced in the patient reflections of a guileless life;—these were men whose society, even transiently enjoyed by one much younger, could not fail to leave impressions equally permanent, useful, and gratifying.

In August, 1814, Mr. Dallas returned to the United States, bearing the despatches from the American commissioners then holding their sessions at Ghent, which announced the prospects little favorable to a speedy peace that are known to have resulted from the earlier conferences with the British envoys. On his arrival, he found his father transferred from the bar of Philadelphia to the head of the Treasury Department—a post requiring, in the complicated state of the finances, and amid the pressing exigencies of the war, all the resources of judgment and talent for which he had been already distinguished, but which he was now destined to display through a brilliant administration of two years, under circumstances and in a manner that secured for him a yet larger share of the applause and confidence of the people of the United States. His son remained with him for a time at Washington, to assist him in the arduous duties of the treasury, and then returned to Philadelphia, to resume, or rather to commence, the actual practice of his profession—an event that was almost immediately followed by his marriage with an accomplished lady, the daughter of Mr. Nicklin, an eminent merchant of that city.

The death of his father, which occurred shortly after he retired from the administration of the Treasury Department, took from Mr. Dallas, in the outset of his career at the bar, not merely the benefit of professional assistance seldom equalled, but those kind and endearing associations which could have grown up only in intercourse with one whose genius was not more brilliant than his affections were warm. Self-dependent, however, he applied himself with the more ardor to practice of the law; and being appointed in 1817, the deputy of the Attorney General in the city of Philadelphia, he soon gave evidence of that skill in conducting criminal cases which has since always distinguished his occasional attention to that branch of his profession. When, in the following year, charges were introduced into the assembly of Pennsylvania against Governor Findlay, which resulted in a legislative investigation, Mr. Dallas acted as his counsel; and the firmness and ability which he displayed throughout the whole proceedings, placed him at once, by general consent, in a rank in his profession that has seldom been attained by so young an advocate.

It is scarcely necessary to remark, that the exigencies of a legal life could not withdraw Mr. Dallas from the deepest interest in political topics. Deriving from the conduct and counsels of his father, and from the association of his earliest youth, as well as those of later years, a strong attachment to the principles and views of the democratic party, he had never failed to co-operate with his fellow-citizens in the measures which were calculated to advance them. The more tranquil administration of Mr. Monroe, succeeding to the fierce political conflicts which existed during the war with England, did not present many questions that rallied party controversies on national affairs; but the election of Governor Heister in Pennsylvania had brought the federal party into power in that State, after a long period of democratic ascendancy; and no one embarked with more zeal than Mr. Dallas in endeavoring to effect the restoration of the policy which he believed to be essential to a sound and just administration of the affairs of the Commonwealth. These efforts resulted in the triumphant re-election of Governor Shultz, the candidate of the democratic party.

But while unanimity, followed by success, thus attended the course of his political associates in the State, the elements of division among the democracy of the Union began to be apparent in regard to the individual who was to succeed Mr. Monroe. Early personal associations, as well as a just appreciation of his distinguished talents, had led Mr. Dallas to unite with a large portion of his political friends in Pennsylvania in a desire that the vote of the State should be given to Mr. Calloun; and the success with which that statesman had conducted the administration of the War Department for the eight previous years seemed to give a certain pledge, notwithstanding his comparative youth, of the ability he would display in any executive office to which the voice of his countrymen should call him. When, however, the general sentiment of the republican party throughout the Union expressed a desire to confer on the venerable patriot who had so long and so faithfully maintained their principles in various posts of civil trust, and so brilliantly augmented the glory of his country in the field of battle, Mr. Dallas, with sentiments towards General Jackson in which the friends of Mr. Calloun in Pennsylvania at once participated, took the lead in suggesting that the younger candidate should be presented to the American people for the second office, while the united and harmonious voice of the democratic party should name General Jackson for the presidential chair. In every measure that resulted from this determination, Mr. Dallas bore a prominent part; the eloquent address in which the democratic convention of the State presented their reasons for the course they had adopted, is generally understood to have proceeded from his pen; and when, in November, 1824, the unusually large majority of more than thirty thousand democratic votes showed the enthusiastic feeling of the people of the State, there were few among them whose zeal had been more honorably and actively displayed than his in producing that gratifying result.

The choice of the House of Representatives having given the presidency to Mr. Adams, the succeeding four years only contributed to create the yet stronger concentration of public opinion in favor of General Jackson; and when he obtained, in 1828, the suffrages of fifteen States, the majority in Pennsylvania had been increased beyond fifty thousand. It was during this interval, that Mr. Dallas received from the people of his native city an honorable mark of their confidence by an election to the mayoralty—an office which for many years past has, in consequence of the federal party, been seldom bestowed upon a person of his political opinions. On the election of General Jackson, he was selected by him as the chief representative of the executive government of the Union in the same city, by being appointed to the office of district attorney of the United States. To the same post his father had been appointed by Mr. Jefferson, through the whole of whose administration he continued to fill it, and from that office Mr. Madison called him to the head of the treasury. His son occupied that post for a much shorter period; but, in the two years during which he discharged its duties, several cases of public interest and considerable magnitude gave full scope to his abilities, and contributed their share to his reputation as a

professional man, which each year continued to augment.

At length, in the year 1831, a vacancy having occurred in the representation from Pennsylvania in the Senate of the United States, the legislature selected Mr. Dallas to fill that honorable post. Thus, in entering for the first time a legislative body, he found himself in the highest and most important assembly that exists under the provisions of the American constitution. A new field was given to his talents as a statesman and an orator. Having at the bar of Philadelphia few equals in forensic eloquence, and being perhaps without a rival—certainly without a superior—at home, on any occasion of public, and especially political discussion, he was now required to match himself with men trained by exercise, as well as possessed of distinguished ability, in a scene which forbade the logical precision of a court, and yet could scarcely call forth or permit the animated current of spontaneous declamation, so often successfully indulged in the lesser assemblies of his fellow-citizens. 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